SOMETHING NEW IN MAGIC; THE FLAG-AND-PEN TRICK

FIRST MOTION. SECOND MOTION. THIRD MOTION. FOURTH AND FINAL MOTION.

THE SOLDIER'S SON

By GABRIELLE REUTER

Fräulein Gabrielle Reuter has long held a prominent place among German essayists and short story writers. In the tale which follows, the ordeals and sufferings which war brings with it form the background for a study of the development of a woman's character. The tragedy of war embitters to the point of revolt those natures which can see in its cruel deprivations only a ruthless invasion of their right to happiness. They are so absorbed in their own personal griefs that they can find no solace in sympathy with other sufferers, in merging their own hard lot with the common lot of those who bear war's burdens.

The cure comes now one way and now another. In this story it is motherhood which broadens and softens a rebellious spirit, which replaces a self-centred, self-pitying disgust with life with a new courage and a new sense of responsibility and duty.

It is a woman's story, written from a woman's point of view—admirable in its naturalness and its veracity. It appeared in the Christmas edition (1915) of the Vienna "Neue Freie Presse," which also contained Mr. Hugo Wittman's "The Conversion of Lysistrate" and Count Eduard Keyserling's "Simone."

THE weather-beaten country house was shrouded in the gloom of a misty, early winter twilight. The shutters on the glass doors fronting the garden, which in summer were always wide open to let in the delicate fragrance of the budding vines and through which laughing young people flitted in and out, were closed tight. Matted and withered vine tendrils clung about them.

At the corner window of the second floor one could see daily the face of the old Baron Kadden. He never looked out over the park; scarcely moved, in fact, but merely stared straight in front of him, and now and then shook his head a little as if in thought—as if his understanding could not grasp the blow which had been dealt him and his house. He no longer went among his farm laborers, no longer rode out to look at the sowed fields. Why should he? The estate had no longer any value in his eyes.

If the newspapers came—papers which the family had once rushed after greedily, almost torn them from one another's hands to see what was happening on the East Front and the West Front—the Baron put them quietly aside. He cared nothing now for news of victories and battles, since his sons no longer had any part in them.

The yellow leaves littered the ground under the bare branches of the old chestnut trees. The gardener had also fallen; no one any longer kept order in the park. The stepdaughters of the Baron walked up and down the long avenue of chestnuts. Their mourning robes, heavy with evening dew, hung about their slender figures. Every afternoon they took his promenade. Sometimes they wept; sometimes they spoke softly to each other; more frequently they walked along in solemn silence. They wore their widows' caps on their heads proudly, almost as if they were coronets.

The third, the youngest, was not with them. She never left her bedroom, where the curtains had to be kept drawn, so as not to let in the light of the winter sun. She was cared for there by the old Baroness Kadden. She had remained an alien to all of them—the daughter of a foreign race (of just what race they were not entirely sure), whom the young Lieutenant von Kadden had married to his parents' great annoyance. She twittered French to him, or lisped in English, or jabbered her passionate Portuguese. She had never been able to comprehend the fact that now men had to die for Austria—that her husband also had to die.

When he left her her cries of despair rang through the castle. Even in the streets of the village people heard them. The women of Carinthia, who looked after the departing soldiers dumbly, with few tears, their feelings locked in their hearts, shook their heads in disapproval. The old Baron Kadden said severely:

"Control yourself, Linda! Have some self-restraint!"

But it was impossible for Linda to exercise self-control. She abandoned herself gladly to her sense of injury and suffering. Every one in the family felt: "She is a foreigner—she will remain a foreigner to us in all her ideas and feelings."

Now Baron Kadden had lost all three of his sons. The oldest fell at Ypres, the second in the East. Soon after there came back a little blood-soaked bag which the youngest had worn on his breast, containing a picture of Linda and a brown, faded rose.

This time Linda had not shrieked. She sat still and stiff among the mourners, and only looked at them with hate-filled eyes. When it got dusk she ran out into the park, into the fir grove, and jumped into the darkening pond. The old Christoph, the family servant, had seen the little, dark figure flit over the open space and had run after her. So she was rescued and brought back to life.

Since that day she had lain in bed. She ate little, and kept staring with the obstinate, evil look of a deranged person straight ahead into vacancy. The old Baroness, the mother whose children had all been taken away from her, watched her day and night lest she should make another attempt on her life.

Linda bore in her womb the hope of the family. If she died, and with her the unborn child, the race of the Kaddens would be extinguished—a race which had borne an honorable name for many centuries.

"Why should it be she and not one of us?" the other daughters asked with envy. "Why is this foreigner favored—she who doesn't know what a precious mission is intrusted to her?" What a new irony of fate for the sorely tried house of Kadden!

The physicians shrugged their shoulders and put on a serious expression when they examined the young wife. Linda muttered to them maliciously:

"Don't worry. It's no use. My son shall not live in order that he may go to war and be shot to pieces."

"Don't be sinful," said the old mother softly. "You don't know whether God will give you a son."

"If it is a daughter, she shall not suffer what I have suffered," Linda rejoined obstinately, and laughed a bitter laugh. "I am not of your sort, who yield to fate and suffer in patience."

"My sons died for the Fatherland," answered the old mother proudly. "I would not call them back to life, even if I could. They did their duty."

"Fatherland?" mocked Linda, with her passionate Southern gestures. "I know no Fatherland. I was born in a hotel. My nursery was a ship or a railroad train. I have no mother tongue. What does a Fatherland mean to me? I loved a man, and when I found he called himself a German I thought it comical. I don't like the Germans—they are so plump and so pedantic. I loved only him. I will not stay alone in this horrible world.

"Oh, dearest, dearest! Linda will come to you soon, very soon!"

It may be, said the physicians, that after a successful delivery there will be a change for the better. But, on the contrary, her condition may become even worse.

So they waited at Castle Kadden. They waited cheerlessly, joylessly, anxiously. The first frost came. Thin cakes of ice swam on the surface of the gloomy pond in which Linda had sought oblivion. The yellow leaves crackled under the feet of the widowed sisters. The sun seldom broke through the clouds. Everybody wondered if the soldiers out in the trenches were not freezing; but people no longer thought about such things with the breathless excitement of the first weeks—only with a dull, submissive weariness.

On the borders the armies held on in expectation of decisive battles. At Castle Kadden they also held on—in numb, deadening pain.

Each evening now the old Baron walked between his two deeply veiled daughters-in-law down the long avenue of chestnuts to the family burial vault. Three laurel wreaths hung there on the black iron gate of the marble chapel. The father gazed long at them, stroked them with his hand so that the leaves and the ribbons rustled. The heads of the daughters were bent under their heavy crepe, and tears wetted their cheeks.

But the mother sat by Linda's bedside. She had not been even once to see the laurel wreaths.

"My duty now is here," she said with quiet patience.

On Christmas Eve, when the thin peal of the bells in the village church tower sounded through the cold, still air, heralding a peace on earth which no longer existed, scurrying steps and lights gave the second story of the castle an unwonted air of animation. Lanterns gleamed in the courtyard; a rider hurried away on a trot through the village street.

A woman fought with death for hours in desperate combat—in bitter anguish.

"Let me die! Have pity! Let me die! Dearest, take me with you! Take me to you!"

So they heard Linda's voice echoing in agony against the ancient walls. The two stepdaughters, who were both childless, watched with the father. They smiled at him, talked of the little feet which would again toddle through the corridors, of the little fists which would gather buttercups for grandpapa. But the longer the time ran on the weaker was the hope that the battle which was being fought in the darkened room would end in victory.

Next morning, just as the window panes were being reddened by the rising sun, the door suddenly opened and the old Baroness appeared in her black dress, with her white hair dishevelled and her face glowing with excitement. She cried aloud: "A boy—a splendid boy!" Then she threw herself on her husband's neck and wept.

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Linda had slept for many hours. Now she had awakened; yet could not yet decide to open her eyes, lest she should interrupt that wonderful sensation of physical wellbeing which possessed her. She felt no pains. How was that possible after such horrible tortures? Had she really suffered all that torment, and then sunk into a deep, dark abyss in which all consciousness was snuffed out?

What had they done to her? She remembered a sweetish, somewhat repellent odor and a voice which warned her, "Breathe deep." Then she had breathed deep—ever deeper, because that relieved her suffering. How beautifully she had slept! Yet there was something else. She had had some other experience.

She tried to recall it. Yes, now she heard again Karl's voice, the voice of her husband. He had stood close beside her and smiled and said: "Fine, little one; perfectly fine!" as he had always said when she had done something which greatly pleased him.

It seemed to her as if in this dream she had received something inexpressibly precious. She enjoyed the happiness which it gave her—a happiness whose effects, like those of a warm, quickening drink, she could feel even to her finger tips. She sought to recall what else had happened to her in the dream, but it all slipped away from her. She retained only the vague impression of some wonderful happening, a quiet, radiant feeling of self-content.

Linda slowly opened her lids. But she had to close them at once, for the whole room was filled with a warm, yellow light. She blinked her eyes, turned her head, and sought to look around without moving too much, for of that she had an instinctive dread.

Her mother-in-law, the Baroness, sat in an easy chair beside her. Before her, on a small table, stood a basket, covered with white lace veiling. The old lady had been overcome by sleep. To Linda her face, with the closed eyelids, seemed much aged. In repose it looked pale and haggard. The hair, ordinarily carefully arranged, hung in loose, wide strands over the cheeks. The head was sunk on the breast, nodding lightly to and fro.

The picture moved the young wife strangely. Tears rose to her eyes. How many nights had the old lady spent there! For always when she opened her eyes Linda had seen the kind face watching, always ready to greet her, to offer her some refreshment. Never had she wept or complained—always at her post like a faithful soldier on foreign soil.

But now the excitements of the last night had exhausted her strength. How soundly she slept in that uncomfortable position! Linda raised her head from the pillows, lifted herself up a little and touched the old Baroness slightly. But the latter did not awake. She didn't even move.

Linda, who had been surrounded the day before by so many people, felt all at once strangely alone with the sleeper. But over there, under the lace veiling, there must be something. A soft sound of wailing came from that direction. She straightened herself up. A feeling of triumph welled up in her. Supporting herself with one hand on the bed rail, she curiously lifted the veiling and pushed the cover back.

Tiny fingers, thin as the filaments of a calyx, were in motion, stretched out before a little red face, from which came the sounds that she had heard. The eyes were tightly closed.

Could it be that that was her child—Linda von Kadden's son? She knew that in the night she had heard a far-away voice which had said something about a son.

Her own son—nobody else's! Her eyes were fixed on the tiny creature. She puzzled her brain, now strangely weak and drowsy, to discover just how things stood between her and this child.

Something dawned in her—a recollection: the gloomy pond in the fir grove; the cold, clammy water which soaked through her clothes, chilling her and taking her breath. And suddenly it seemed to her as if a veil was lifted in her consciousness. There it stood again, that horrible something. It stared at her as it had stared through all those sleepless nights. That strange face, in which she recognized neither man nor woman, only hideous beyond all measure as it came ever closer to her, bent over toward her ear and softly, huskily whispered:

"Do it! Do it! Then you will never again feel pain. It is so easy; only do it! You can't get out of doing it!"

Linda cast a frightened glance about her. Yes, now was the chance. She needed only to bend a little further over the basket, to stretch out her hand and take it by the throat, in order to choke the tiny windpipe—just as one kills a little bird, with one squeeze—and then to the window, and out of it.

She waited breathlessly thinking of what she was going to do. She felt her heart beat turbulently. Then the child made a slight movement; it was as if he stretched out his arms toward her. His little mouth opened appealingly.

She felt at the same time in her breast the warm rush of the mother's milk which was to nourish him. Her passionate black eyes filled with tears. An immense longing took possession of her. She sighed deeply and sank back exhausted on the pillows. The old Baroness had awakened. She rubbed her hand across her eyes, shook herself and looked at the younger woman in amazement.

Linda smiled. She had always called the Baroness "Mamita," with a peculiar foreign accent which no one in the house could imitate.

Now she said slowly, with a friendly, almost affectionate expression on her delicate features:

"Grandmother, my son is hungry."

The old lady trembled with happiness as she handed over the child.

"Now you must sleep again," said the Baroness a few minutes later.

Linda let herself be tucked in.

"Leave the little one with me—very close to me," she whispered. "Then evil thoughts cannot come."

The old Baroness did as she wished, kissing her tenderly on the brow.

Clear and sharp the holiday bells began to call to service.

"Is this Sunday?" asked Linda uncertainly.

"It is the Christmas Day," said the grandmother. In her face joy and sorrow contended. Innumerable memories flitted through her mind, all whispering, "Gone forever! Gone forever!"

The young wife took her hand and said: "Go to father; he will need you. I will rest here and look at my child."

The old lady nodded assent. She knew that she could leave Linda alone now without anxiety.

The latter lay still, and thought of the dearly loved voice which had said to her in the night: "Fine, little one! Fine!" She was absorbed in the memory of that voice; she clothed herself with it as with a warming mantle of love. She felt no longer the sharp pangs of sorrow which had formerly associated themselves with every thought of her husband. A feeling of tranquillity and a mild interest in the future began to possess her soul.

If it were only true that the dead did not disappear utterly in the cold, blood-soaked earth! If something of them still lived, still worked, still had power to influence with mysterious power the hearts of those they left behind! How consoling would be the assurance that love is still stronger than death—that in spite of death it is still able to exert its ancient mastery!

Seldom had Linda thought about such things in her short life, which had been only merriment and jest and playfulness—and then black desperation. But now that she was a mother she must begin to consider how her husband would have wished her to feel and act. She would yield obediently to his wishes, so that once more in the darkness of night she might hear his voice whisper in her ear: "Fine, little one! Fine!"

Something moved in her arms. The infant pushed his head a little closer to her warm body. She kissed him on his rosy cheek. She breathed the peculiar perfume of his tiny body.

"You shall have a Fatherland," whispered Linda. "You shall be a good Austrian, like your father—just as he would like you to be."

And all at once it seemed to her as if she could no longer keep her happiness to herself—that she must proclaim it and share it with others.

She reached with her right hand for the silver bell which stood on a side table, and rang it. She cried, her eyes shining, to the old Baroness:

"I cannot sleep or rest. Bring Father and the Sisters! I want them to see my child." When the old Baron Kadden, followed by the two black figures of the widowed daughters, entered the room, Linda summoned all her strength. She was still pretty weak, but she wanted to make a little speech, and to make it in German. She had to think over every word, for she didn't care to make any blunders. She held the child up to the gray, bent old man, while her pretty face shone with the radiance of maternal love:

"Father, it is Christmas. See, I give you my little Christ child—my son. I do not want to have him for my own. He shall belong to all of us—to the whole house of Kadden. To you—and to you."

She smiled at her two sisters-in-law.

"You must all help me to make him a good mother."

"Linda, Linda, has a miracle happened?" asked the old man in amazement and agitation, while he took the child and looked at the latest offshoot of his ancient race.

"Yes, it is really a miracle," answered Linda softly. "A Christmas miracle. I believe now that our dead live. How they do I don't know. But I feel strength and love in my heart which a dead man has given me, and I have no other wish than to let him guide me."

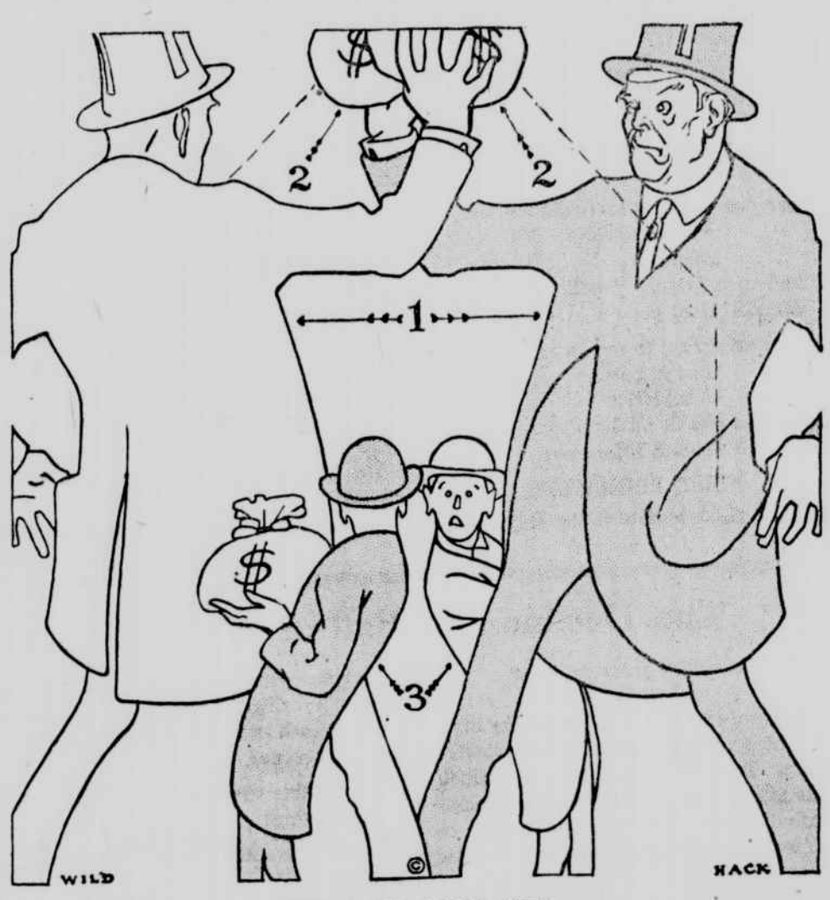
"Teach us all that, my daughter," said the old Baron Kadden solemnly. "I thank you for myself and for my house. Our Fatherland blooms anew in this child, which has been born to us. And so we will hope and trust that the spirits of our dead will instil into us strength and faith, in order that we may be able to lift the newest generation up out of the gloom of to-day into the bright sunshine of a happier future."

A STORY OF WAR AND A WOMAN

Translated by WILLIAM L. McPHERSON

HOW TO MAKE MONEY

By Robert J. Wildhack



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For there remuneration almost every time is double.
You are paid to smother Trouble with a sponge of ambiguity,
And then you're paid a little more for starting all the Trouble.

1. Lawyer. (Two views.)
2. Weapons.
3. Client. (Two views.)